

## FIRST-PERSON: Just Imagine It

by Kevin Parker, posted Thursday, April 09, 2020 (18 days ago)



ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (BP) -- Pastors, church staff and church members have held to tradition and familiarity so tightly.

Imagine what would have happened three months ago if a pastor had proposed holding church services only through livestreams. Imagine if a Sunday School leader had proposed to his or her pastor that their group stop meeting together for a while and meet via Zoom meetings. Imagine what the church would have thought of a pastor to students who suggested moving Wednesday night Bible studies to videos posted on YouTube.

Those proposals, if pursued, would have caused church splits. They would have angered members and caused rifts between generations. They would have stalled a congregation's Great Commission mission. They would have stifled the Gospel. Just imagine it.

Even as COVID-19 ravaged China and upset official Christian congregations and house churches in that country, those ideas would have torn American churches apart. They would have fragmented God's people. They would have seemed preposterous or outrageous. Who would even have considered such nonsense? Who would have proposed such things?

Now, nearly every congregation has embraced the outrageous. They have embraced the preposterous. The unimaginable has become normal. No one could have predicted the change. But all along, God was watching

His people. He knew. He was prepared.

Instead of fragmenting the church, those nonsensical technologies have held churches together. Instead of causing divisions, they have fostered connections. Instead of splitting churches, church members are flocking to virtual meetings. Just imagine it.

Imagine what would have happened if a pastor had suggested that the church stop meeting inside the worship center for a while. Instead, he proposed, members should drive to the property, but remain in the parking lot inside their cars, with windows closed -- no one touching anyone. They would, he proposed, turn on their FM car radio and listen to the pastor as he preached from the church porch. And worship, he would suggest, would be led by a single person playing a guitar. Everyone would sing inside their cars.

Imagine a children's ministry leader proposing to the pastor and other church leaders that children stay home and watch Bible study videos through an app. They would play games in the app, she would suggest. They would interact with ministry leaders through the app and through social media. "It can work," she would plead. And everyone would have said, "No way."

Today, normal has changed. It seems that so many church ministries have been altered. And, after a time apart, technology seems less evil. People of every age and every race are watching on YouTube, Skype, Zoom and Facebook.

Just as offices closed their doors and sent employees to work at home (if they could), churches (most of them) closed their doors and sent people home -- for protection. The closures worried clergy and laity. The new normal is still difficult.

But God is working.

Pastors are hosting more Bible studies and prayer meetings than ever before. Less energy is focused on scrubbing the church bathrooms and vacuuming the church carpets. Pulpits have given way to desks and kitchen tables. And no one is complaining. Everyone feels blessed to have an option.

In the midst of all of that praying and Bible study, God's Word and God's people are more accessible to lost people than they have been in decades. And all of that is happening while Christians are hardly leaving their homes. People are praying for neighbors, running errands and delivering food. Saints are checking on one another. People are concerned for each other.

I hate COVID-19. But, I am unsure about how much I dislike what it has done for the church. We are learning more about ourselves. Christians are growing. Faith is flourishing. In reality, nothing is lost.

